

Hello and thank you for having me here this afternoon. My name is Christopher James and I'm a proud Bridgeport father of two incredibly amazing children, Elisa, who is a freshman in college and Brandon, a tenth grader.

I have attended this hearing for the last two years, this being the 3rd time, I will continue to come here every time there is an issue so detrimental to our Connecticut children's well being, as it has been said and seen today.

I am here today to urge the General Assembly to pass an education formula that is fair and just for ALL students - no matter who they are, where they live or what type of public school they attend. When you see the line item for the education budget, to many it is just a line item, but to our children it is a life item that greatly affects their future. Why should my child be funded any differently than yours? What people need to understand is that charter schools ARE public schools. Shouldn't ALL public school students be funded the exact same way based on their needs? This seems obvious to me and many of the parents standing in front of you today.

For thousands of students across Connecticut -- including my daughter Elisa and son Brandon -- gaining a spot at one of the state's public charter schools has proven to be a life-changing event.

We decided, as a family, to enter Elisa and Brandon into charter school lotteries because we knew that attending these high-quality schools would set them on the path to a brighter future. Brandon is a 10th grader at Bridge Academy while Elisa has just graduated from there. Under the guidance of caring, highly qualified teachers, both Elisa and Brandon have thrived both academically and socially.

Now, as state legislators deliberate on Connecticut's budget, parents like me are speaking out to ensure charter schools receive the funding they need. Charter schools like Bridge Academy already suffer from chronic underfunding, the victims of a large discrepancy between state aid to charter and district schools. On average, public charter schools like the ones my children attend receive \$4,000 less per student than traditional public schools.

This funding gap has had a real impact on charter schools. Charter leaders have spent years doing the absolute best they could with insufficient state aid, but as enrollment climbs it's becoming more and more difficult for schools to cover rapidly rising costs and keep up with the growing demand for resources. Unless Connecticut takes steps to level the playing field between public charters and their district counterparts, the future of my children's schools could be in serious danger. The stakes are too high for this to happen.

Tonight, I ask you to internalize my message and stand up, not only for my two children, but for all public charter school students in Connecticut. Thank you.